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REVOLUTIONARY CORRESPONDENCE OF COL. JOSIAH PARKER, OF ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY, VA.

[We are indebted to the kindness of Mr. Robert M. Hughes, of Norfolk, Va., for the copies from which the following letters were printed. He found them recently among some old papers of Governor John B. Floyd. The papers sent to the Society by Mr. Hughes are copies from the originals, which had been submitted to Mr. Floyd, while Secretary of War, in 1857, by Leopold D. P. Cowper, a descendant of Col. Parker. Josiah Parker, of "Macclesfield," Isle of Wight Co., was descended from Thomas Parker, who received a grant of land in that County in 1650. Josiah Parker was born May 11, 1751 and died Mar. 11, 1810. He was a member of the Virginia Revolutionary Conventions, was Major, Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel of the 5th Virginia, and served with distinction at Trenton, Brandywine and elsewhere. He resigned from the Continental service July 12, 1778, but was actively engaged in militia service until the close of the war. He was the first representative from his district in the U. S. Congress. For a sketch of Col. Parker and his family, see this Magazine VI, 420-424.]

The invasion referred to in Jefferson's letter of Oct. 26, 1780, was the occupation of Portsmouth by General Leslie who, however, sailed for South Carolina in November. The other letters refer to the invasion of Arnold, Phillips and Cornwallis. See Campbell's History of Virginia 706-742.]

Sir,

Richmond October 26, 1780.

The invasion of our country, lately taken place has rendered it necessary to call into the field a large body of militia to oppose them. The Executive are very anxious as far as it can be done, to substitute in place of the militia officers, others who to equal zeal join experience in military duties. Should your present situation admit you to take over them the same command you held in the regular service, I am now to ask the favor of you to do it; and trust that your wish to expel the invading enemy

from among us will overweigh many domestick inconveniences which might attend it. I wish to receive your answer by the bearer or any speedier opportunity, and that you may join the Commanding officer as soon as possible if you can undertake the charge, as I suppose the whole force will assemble between this date and the 12th of the ensuing month. I readily apprehend that difficulties about relative rank between the gentlemen who have resigned, and those who have continued in service may arise; The removal of these is beyond the reach of our powers; and I shall think it unfortunate indeed, if our country should for that cause lose the services of gentlemen in a crisis where they are so vitally important. I cannot but rely that those who have so far changed their line of life, as that military rank is no longer their object, will cheerfully take their stand at the most useful place in which the laws have left it in our power to employ them.

I am, with great respect, Sir,

Your Most Ob^t humble Serv

Th. Jefferson

Head Quarters Camp at Petersburg,
13 January 1781

All the militia and volunteers in the Lower counties are to put themselves under the immediate command of Colonel Josiah Parker.

Steuben

Major General.—M

By the express directions of the Honble Major General, the Baron de Steuben, Colonel Josiah Parker is authorised to collect the militia of the counties of Isle of Wight, Nansemond, Princess Ann and Norfolk counties, in such proportions as he may see cause, and to arrange, officer and regiment them as he may think proper.

Colonel Willis will proceed with the Light Infantry under him to Suffolk and there abide by the orders which Colonel Parker will give him.

By order of Baron de Steuben,
Ro. Lawson, B. G. M.

Petersburg January 13, 1781.

Sir,

Your letter of the 12: I have this moment received I am much obliged to you for all the steps you have taken hitherto—you mention your not having any command prevents you from executing what you would advise to be done. I hereby authorise you to take the command of all the militia and volunteers assembled below, and to take such measures for opposing the enemy as you shall deem to be for the public good.

The majority of the troops that are assembled hereabout are encamped at Bland's ordinary, where I join tomorrow myself, and should the enemy take possession of Portsmouth or any other place below not only the party under Col. Clark, which is at Cabbin point, shall move downward but I shall march that way with all my force; and as you are acquainted with the country thereabouts I shall give you the command of the troops which will be on the lines.

I shall be glad you'd endeavor to embody a troop of militia cavalry in the country where you are as I have done there myself already.

It is of the highest importance I should as soon as possible be acquainted with the enemy's farther intention; whether they mean to take post below at Portsmouth or thereabouts or to proceed up the Potowmack in order to make an attempt on Fredericksburg, which, in my opinion is a very important object or any where else for should they intend up the Potowmack and I should move any great distance down the James river (even two or three days' march) it might delay my operations that way unnecessarily. I must therefore request that you will, on the first intimation you obtain of their designs, inform me of it without the least delay.

I have just heard that there is a quantity Artillery and some ammunition lying at South Quay; if it is that you will take every in your power to have the secured, and at all events prevent them from being of service to the enemy.

Col. Josiah Parker.

This is all the commission I can at present send you, the Executive being at so great a distance from us as to put it out of my power to obtain a proper one for you. With respect to

the disposition of these troops you will receive orders from the Marquis.

I enclose you a warrant for the purpose of impressing horses which I wish you to put into proper hands to execute.

I am, Dear Colonel

Your most

Obedient Servant,

Thomas Nelson Jr. B. G.

Addressed to

Colonel Josiah Parker
Smithfield.

To

You are hereby authorised and empowered to impress in the counties contiguous to the march of the enemy such and so many horses as the Honble Major General Marquis Fayette shall direct, following in the course of your proceedings the sense and intention of the House of Delegates expressed in their resolutions of this date as amended and hereto annexed.

Given under my hand at Charlottesville this 28 day of May in the year of our Lord 1781, and of the Commonwealth, the fifth.

Th. Jefferson

In the House of Delegates,

Monday May 28, 1781.

Resolved, That the Governor be advised to issue his warrant to the Honble Major General Marquis la Fayette, empowering him to impress in the counties contiguous to the march of the enemy all such horses as he shall think necessary for the use of the Army under his command.

Resolved, That all horses taken under any impress warrant shall be appraised in specie by two field officers to be appointed for that purpose, which valuation shall be paid in specie or in paper at the real exchange.

Resolved, That impress warrants ought to be issued only to commissioned officers and by them to be produced whenever an impress is made.

Resolved, That stud horses and others actually employed in moving the families or effects of the owners ought not to be impressed.

Resolved, That the Marquis ought to be desired to have an exact return made to the Auditor of this State, specifying the names of the owners, the amount of the valuation of each horse, and the uses to which the several horses shall be appointed; and that proper certificates ought to be given to the persons from whom the impresses are made, expressing the valuation, and the purpose for which such horses were taken.

Teste. John Beckley C h D.

By an amendment brood mares are not to be taken unless the owners, on reasonable notice, delay to remove them out of the way of the enemy, in which case stud horses are also to be taken.

Th Jefferson.

Richmond 18 July 1781.

D^r Sir,

I have received your favor of the 16th. Be assured I feel for the personal distresses you have experienced in consequence of your zeal in the service of your country. I shall always acknowledge them with pleasure, and I dare say they will not be suffered to pass unnoticed.

I am much obliged to you for the intelligence from General Jones, and the particular account of the enemy's force and appropriation. Your situation has been delicate, but you must be sensible, that a reinforcement from this side was impracticable at this juncture. The enemy's command of the water gives them advantages which our expedients cannot counterbalance. Genl. Wayne and Genl. Morgan, however, have crossed and will endeavour to fall in with Tarleton, who, it is said, was to be at Petersburg last night. But this detachment can only be to you as a very distant support. I must not flatter you. You must rely, for some time yet, on that circumspection and activity which has heretofore marked the movements of your corps. You are acting the partizan, with a handful of men against a large army, and will, of course, be directed by the principles which govern such corps.

Let me hear from you, as your intelligence must be important.

I am D^r Sir,

Your Ob^t Servt.

Lafayette.

P. S. I wish you to communicate with Gen. Gregory through the swamp (if practicable) for your mutual safety.

Addressed to

Col. Parker.

Head Quarters 27 July 1781.

D^r Sir,

I have your letter before me of the 24^h. The deserters from your corps or those who joined the enemy are punishable by the laws of war, more especially as martial law is declared. This is made to extend twenty miles from our camp and twenty from that of the enemy's. Every military crime within this circle is cognizable by our courts.

I am truly sensible of your services, and I am persuaded your country cannot be otherwise. As you give me time enough to write my letters, I shall trouble you with some to France.

There appears something mysterious in the delay of the fleet at Hampton road. One would think they intended to take on board more troops—and yet, there are not appearances enough favorable of a general embarkation. Is it not possible for you to find out what detains the fleet? and will it not be safe, to move nearer the enemy's lines to ascertain their intentions, and improve the opportunity of injuring them should a general embarkation take place? This, however, does not seem probable from any intelligence I have yet received, But you will settle this matter by sending proper persons into Portsmouth, to see what they are doing with their cannon and stores &c.

When you find it necessary to retire, I dare say you will place things in such a train that I shall be informed as usual. I shall, however, regret your absence. But before you go, I wish you to learn as much as possible on the points I have mentioned.

I am D^r Sir,

Your Ob^t & hble Serv

Lafayette.

Endorsement.

Col. Parker, at this time, intended to make a voyage to France, in consequence of the losses he had sustained by the invasion of the enemy, but declined it, as he thought his services might be required by his country.

A. W. P. C.

Richmond July 27, 1781.

Dear Sir,

When your letter came to Richmond, I was absent, and it being mixed with many others which I had not time to look over, I did not know, when Mr. Pierce went hence, that there was one from you.

The late very critical season of the year has prevented the Marquis reinforcing you as could have been wished. I felt much for you and the country under your immediate command, but circumstances rendered support impracticable. Were the means of defending the country equal to my inclination to protect it, not a spot should be subject to British depredations; but we must make use of the abilities we have and lament that they are not more adequate to the purpose.

I am sincerely concerned for the unhappy fate of Capt. Nott. He was a firm Whig and an active spirited officer, whose death will be severely felt by the friends of America in that part of the country. The villain who murdered him will, I hope, meet with punishment equal to the horrid crime he has committed. By a law passed the last session of Assembly the commanding officer was empowered to declare martial law, agreeably to the Continental Articles of War, within 20 miles of our camp, and within the same distance of the enemys. The Marquis was furnished with this law, and proclaimed it in General Orders at his camp, and I expected had extended his orders to the different camps. Butler clearly is subject to the penalties inflicted by that law, to which you are referred, and for a copy of which I shall apply to the Marquis, as also for his General Orders, which shall be transmitted to you. I am well pleased with your answer to the feeble menaces of the enemy respecting Butler. Pray send me the

names of the disaffected in the counties below that proper measures may be adopted to prevent their doing future injuries to the State.

The Commissary General will be directed to pay proper attention to your troops, to keep them well supplied with provisions. I approve much of Mr. Pierce to act in the Department of Commissary, and will recommend him, but we must have one Principal to look to, and he has hitherto made the appointments. As soon as we can procure a supply of money from Charlottesville, from whence we have not yet removed the Treasury, your Quartermaster shall be supplied with a sum for current expenses.

Your letter of the 24th was delivered to me yesterday, evening by Capt. Brown. I am greatly concerned for your losses this invasion, and am sorry to hear that you propose leaving us. Much, however, as I wish you to continue in the field, I cannot insist on a measure that may so materially interfere with your private interest. At the same time I assure you that your country will, in my opinion, very sensibly feel the want of your services.

I am, dear Sir, With great esteem
Your Obe^t & very hble Serv
Thomas Nelson Jr.

Col. Josiah Parker.

Malvern Hill July 28, 1781.

Dear Sir,

I had the pleasure of writing to you yesterday and will only add a request that a communication be opened with General Gregory and his letters to me forwarded with the utmost dispatch.

Should the enemy evacuate Portsmouth, a supposition to which you give little credit, you will to the best of your power improve the circumstance. Should any attempt to go to Carolina by the eastern side of the Dismal Swamp, you will try to help General Gregory in giving them annoyance.

At all events, my dear Sir I more warmly and affectionately request you will remain with the command until the enemy's intentions are better understood. The moment this fleet sails, and we may examine what remains, I will be able to determine my operations, then, if necessary, you might leave your present command—indeed, I do not refuse to grant your request. But this you are at liberty. I hope you will not determine to leave the corps without we better know what is to be depended upon.

There will be a chain established between us and I hope to hear from you.

With the highest esteem
Have the honor to be
Yours
Lafayette.